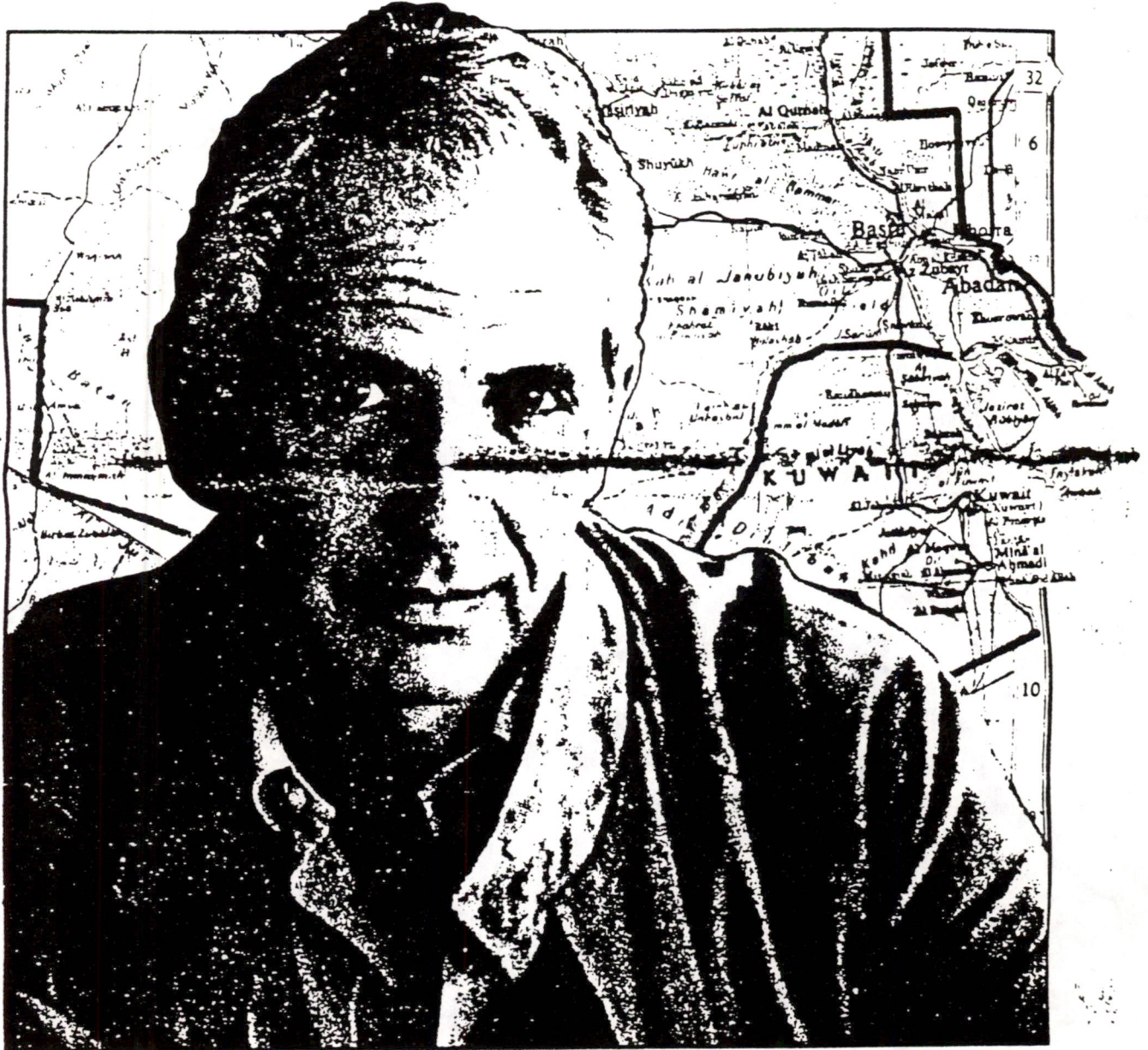


RUMORS OF WAR

A conversation with former defense analyst and dedicated peace activist Daniel Ellsberg



BY TIMOTHY BENEKE

"I feel like we're reliving the summer of 1964. The government is moving fast toward launching a war that may well be catastrophic."

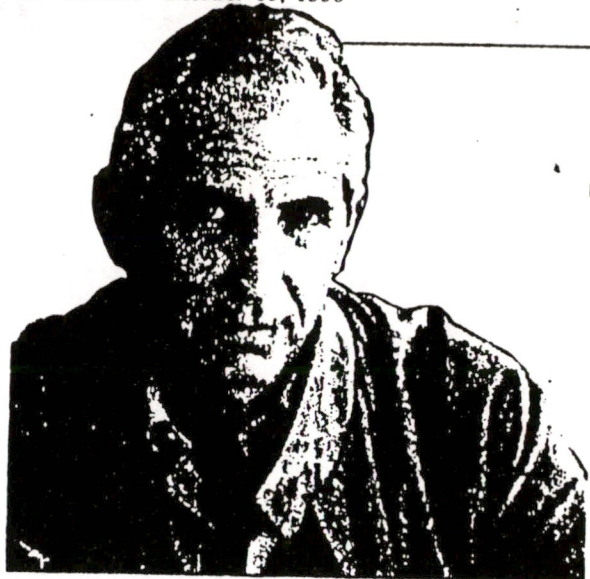
This country," Daniel Ellsberg recently wrote, "is mad. Psychotically divorced from reality." The crucial reality Americans are out of touch with, Ellsberg contends, is the growing possibility that we are headed for a protracted and bloody war with Saddam Hussein—a war which will be not only disastrous for Iraq and the US, but which will undermine a fragile and burgeoning new world order.

Ellsberg is a man peculiarly well suited to assess the pitfalls and delusions of America's foray into the Middle East. His background includes expertise on

strategic planning and decision-making, coupled with an intense moral and political commitment that has placed him in the forefront of debates about American foreign policy for twenty years.

His personal history also reflects a capacity to grow and change. Ellsberg attended Harvard in the late '40s and early '50s, where he edited the campus literary magazine and wrote a highly regarded thesis on decision-making processes in uncertain situations. After graduating summa cum laude and spending a year as a Woodrow Wilson Fellow at

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"The Congress is giving George Bush the powers of George III. And that's cowardly and irresponsible. They shouldn't want a George IV. That's not what the Revolution was fought for."

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Cambridge, he joined the Marines in 1954. His decision was inspired by no less an eminence than John Wayne, whose heroism in *The Sands of Iwo Jima* had captured Ellsberg's imagination in his college days. In the Marines, Ellsberg excelled, just as he had as a student, and became the only first lieutenant in his division to command his own rifle company. It was a role he exulted in and loved. He felt such a strong paternalistic bond with the men in his company—"his men" as he thought of them—that when his two-year enlistment was up he chose to stay on for another year, rather than send them off to fight without him in the then-brewing Suez crisis.

After leaving the Marines, Ellsberg was elected to Harvard's prestigious Society of Fellows, where young scholars of great promise are given the freedom to develop themselves. His intellectual focus returned to what he'd written about as an undergraduate: decision-making and uncertainty. After earning a PhD in economics from Harvard and recognition from prominent members of the newly installed administration of President John F. Kennedy, Ellsberg joined a major think tank, the Rand Corporation. By

the time he was thirty, he was a high level consultant not only to the departments of State and Defense, but to the White House. His comet was in remarkable ascendance. He drafted several major policy addresses for Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara; he was the sole drafter of the section on nuclear war policy guidance in a directive prepared for the Joint Chiefs of Staff; and he was part of a team working under the National Security Council during the Cuban missile crisis.

In 1964, as the American involvement in Vietnam grew, Ellsberg joined first the Department of Defense and then the State Department. He was given civil service rankings that made him the civilian equivalent of a three-star general. In 1965, Ellsberg requested and was given an assignment in Vietnam where, from 1965 to 1967, he evaluated the war firsthand. Although a civilian, he put himself in situations of risk where he was directly involved in combat, and both gave and received fire.

While in Vietnam, Ellsberg slowly came to believe that the war was wrong. One inci-

dent stands out in his mind as, if not revelatory, at least marking the shift. Ellsberg recalls the day he was walking point with an infantry platoon in the Mekong Delta. Ellsberg was moving through a rice paddy in water up to his knees when he suddenly heard firing to his rear directed at the troops behind him. He quickly got down and saw what looked like boys wearing ragged black shorts and jerseys. It was rare to get such a clear and vivid view of enemy soldiers. They had let Ellsberg and the other men in the lead move past them so they could fire on the larger body of troops a hundred yards back. Ellsberg couldn't shoot at them, because it would have meant firing in the direction of his own troops. He kept his head down, but watched intently as the soldiers disappeared after a minute and a half into the tall grass.

Ellsberg was quite shaken by the experience and asked himself, "Who are these guys?" It was, he says, a dizzying, "existential" moment in which his definition of moral and political reality was thrown into question. He got a glimmering that these were local farm boys protecting their own neighborhood against foreign invaders.

Later that day, as they approached their home base, his platoon was fired on again. Ellsberg hit the ground and turned to the radio man lying next to him and said, "Have you ever felt like we were the British redcoats over here?"

"Man," the Marine replied, "I've been thinking that all day."

Ellsberg returned to the US and tried to convince his superiors that the war was doomed to fail, only to meet an arrogance and self-delusion that has since been well-documented. He was asked by aides to Secretary of Defense McNamara to draft part of what would become a seven-thousand-page classified study of America's decision-making in Vietnam from 1945 to 1968. Ellsberg was given access to the study and, after reading it, concluded that the side we were supporting in Vietnam had been entirely recruited, paid, equipped, trained, and directed by foreigners. From Ellsberg's perspective, the US was not on the wrong side; we were the wrong side.

In 1969, he established for himself an enduring place in the ragged history of the American left when he, along with a colleague, Anthony Russo, handed over a copy of what became known as the "Pentagon Papers" to the *New York Times*. The papers made it clear that the government had consistently lied about its role in the war. Ellsberg was indicted on twelve felony counts and faced a possible sentence of 115 years in prison. His case was thrown out of court by a judge in 1973, who cited an extensive pattern of government misconduct in relation to the defendant.

Since then Daniel Ellsberg has been an important figure in America's peace movement. Ellsberg, now 59, has been honored with the Gandhi award and the Tom Paine award. He has written numerous articles and academic papers, along with a 1972 book, *Papers on the War*. In addition, he has been arrested some fifty times in acts of civil disobedience.

When I met with him for this interview, he was a man possessed.

country was heading towards disaster, and he was marshalling all of his considerable analytical powers to try to comprehend and forestall this reality. As one all too afflicted with the last decade's easy cynicism and indulgent despair, I felt that it was not only an honor, but a joy, to bear witness to such clear and exigent moral passion. Ellsberg gives ob- session a good name.

The interview was conducted in Ellsberg's Kensington home on October 4.

Timothy Beneke: *Tell us what you've been thinking about the Mideast crisis.*

Daniel Ellsberg: I feel that we're reliving the summer of 1964. I didn't really believe we'd ever go through this again so closely; God knows, I never wanted to. I thought the country had learned better. I couldn't believe that Congress could forget so much.

Once again, as in '64, I see the Executive Branch moving fast toward launching a war that may well be catastrophic; a war that we could avoid, a war that the great majority of the public would almost surely reject if it were put to them, and if they understood what it will probably mean.

We're not talking about a Grenada or a Panama. The Center for Strategic and International Studies calculates 30,000 American soldiers killed or wounded if the Iraqis conduct a fighting withdrawal from Kuwait, or higher if the Iraqis "fight to the death defending current position," to say nothing of allied or civilian casualties throughout the Middle East.

Yet—just as in that campaign summer of '64—the society as a whole, the Congress, the media, the churches and campuses, the public at large are doing almost nothing to resist the imminent prospect of a major war, as if they were asleep, as if they were still on vacation. That's the part that's hardest for me to understand, especially because in great contrast to 1964, this time the administration is hardly, any longer, attempting to conceal its hand.

What do you think should be happening right now?

Intense hearings and debates in Congress—filibusters, if necessary, in the Senate—on the possible consequences and costs of the war that is looming and on whether this country should go to war; moves to use the War Powers Act and the budgetary process to block Presidential offensive initiatives, especially while Congress is not in session. TV and print journalists pressing these questions, talk

shows, front pages and op-ed pages all preoccupied with them. Town meetings, teach-ins, demonstrations, preparation for nonviolent civil disobedience if necessary. This topic [should be] the number one issue in the October campaigns all across the country.

That's pretty far from the current reality.

What's uppermost on my mind today is the pitiful—really, the outrageous—performance of Congress this week. With very few exceptions, the members of Congress have refused to acknowledge any responsibility for making the decision whether or not to go to war, even though they must have read it somewhere—e.g., in grade school—that the drafters of the Constitution intended to give that decision *exclusively* to Congress, not to be shared with the Executive.

The original intent of that provision—to make it hard to go to war, to avoid unnecessary or wrongful wars caused, as Tom Paine put it, by "the pride of kings"—has never seemed more important. Yet this Congress is mocking the wisdom of the constitutional strategy to that end, which puts the decision in their hands. They don't even want a *share* of the responsibility, or the blame. Their motto is, "Let George do it."

At a time when they have every indication that the Executive Branch once again may be within weeks of taking the country to war without any authorization from Congress, they have just passed bills that, in effect, leave the decision entirely to the President. They are giving George Bush the powers of George III. And that's cowardly and irresponsible. They shouldn't want a George IV. That's not what the Revolution was fought for.

However important the budget deficit may be, it's not remotely so consequential in the near future as the question of whether the US should or will initiate a war in the Middle East in the next few weeks or months.

The truth is that Congress doesn't have any more important decision to make, ever, than whether or not to go to war. And they've never had so clear a warning before the event—not before Korea, or Vietnam, or Grenada or Panama—that if they don't act to restrain him, the President is likely to take us to war on his own.

The Congressional leaders have taken great pains to point out that they have refused to give the President a "blank check" for offensive action, a Tonkin Gulf-type resolution.

They're kidding themselves, and us. It's true that, as Mel Levine put it, they didn't explicitly "authorize or encourage" him to launch an offensive, or to do anything else. But they know per-

fectly well that he doesn't believe needs any explicit authorization from Congress to carry out the offensive he's openly preparing for. And they did nothing at all to tell him otherwise, or to discourage him from doing it.

What they really wanted was to get on record before the election that they agreed with the popular parts of what he has done—the blockade and the deterrent actions—without taking any responsibility for whatever comes next. They want to be able to say, "Don't blame us for whatever he decides from here on out."

If he stays with the embargo and doesn't attack, and the embargo falls apart or doesn't get Saddam out of Kuwait, they can say, "We didn't tie his hands; it's not our fault if he's a weak cowardly wimp."

If he does attack—probably largely because he anticipates the charge of weakness if he doesn't, and from Democrats too—and it turns out disastrously, as it probably will, they can say, "Don't blame us! We didn't authorize or encourage him."

As a matter of fact, they probably have encouraged him, by signaling him that there are less than three dozen people in the House and a handful in the Senate who will take any political risk to keep him from going to war. Of course, the rest have reserved their right to complain after he goes to war, when it goes badly, but he doesn't need to be told that.

State Department officials can say they didn't encourage Saddam Hussein to invade Kuwait. Through statements to Congress and directly through our ambassador in Baghdad, they just told him—when he was massing offensive forces on the northern border of Kuwait—that they had no complaints about anything he had done so far, and that they had no opinion on his border dispute.

Of course, they thought he was bluffing.

Now Bush is massing offensive forces on the southern border of Kuwait. Is Congress sure he's bluffing? If not, what do they feel about it? They take no official position.

Henry Gonzales was an early, honorable exception in raising the war powers issue. And one Congressman, Charles Bennett, an 82-year-old conservative Democrat from Florida with forty years in Congress, introduced a bill in mid-September [House Concurrent Resolution 372] stating succinctly: "The Congress finds... that the Constitution of the

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United States vests all power to declare war in the Congress of the United States. Any offensive action taken against Iraq must be explicitly approved by the Congress of the United States before such action may be initiated."

That is what Congress should have voted on, and passed, by now, and one of the things they should still do. Better yet, they should make that a restriction on Defense Department spending for next year in the appropriations bill.

But that was not what Congress was up to last week. What both the House and Senate just passed [on October 1 and 2] were resolutions praising what the President has done so far in response to Iraq's aggression against Kuwait. They referred approvingly to his blockading of Iraq in support of the UN-endorsed embargo and his deploying US troops—specifying no level—as part of a "multinational deterrent" force to defend Saudi Arabia against attack.

The great majority of the public agrees with those purposes, and so do I. But those publicly announced purposes alone don't account for everything he's done "so far," by a long shot, let alone what he's clearly preparing to do. And by now Congress can't really pretend they don't know that.

Defending Saudi Arabia isn't the function of the last hundred thousand troops the President has sent over, still less of the next seventy thousand or so still to go. Over a month ago the Pentagon stopped claiming that the additional heavy tanks and artillery and planes still pouring in to the Gulf were needed to defend against Iraqi attack. Both in numbers and type, the majority of the forces we've sent and those still on the way are designed for offensive action against Iraqi forces and installations in Kuwait and Iraq.

And there have been more and more authoritative leaks from the Pentagon and elsewhere that all the administration may be waiting for before sending those

forces into offensive action is the *completion of the buildup* in mid-October or early November: not any major attack by Iraq, which they don't expect, nor any explicit authorization from Congress, which they don't feel they need.

If Congress wanted to prevent that, or if it wanted to have a determining say in the decision—beyond having some committee chairmen "consulted" a few hours before the planes take off—they passed up their chance to say so this week.

Their best chance will come about the second week in October, when they could put a restriction in the appropriations bill forbidding any budgeted money from being spent on offensive operations against Iraqi forces—in the absence of Iraqi attack on US forces—without explicit authorization by Congress. But by the time this is printed, we can predict that they will have missed that chance to avert or postpone this war, as they have the full Constitutional power to do by this budgetary route. (We'll be lucky if one member of Congress has the courage to propose it).

That is the way the Vietnam War was finally ended: by the McGovern-Hatfield Bill cutting off the funding. Senator Hatfield, to his credit, was one of the three Senators who voted against this Senate resolution, along with Ted Kennedy—who said that it was "a Tonkin Gulf Resolution for the Persian Gulf"—and Bob Kerrey.

The original Tonkin Gulf Resolution, in the summer of 1964, had only two votes against it. This one had three. Of course, that's fifty percent more. I guess that's the measure of what the Senate has learned in the last quarter-century, or what they've retained.

The House showed more progress. In '64 no one in the House voted against the blank check. This time there were 29 votes against, with Ron Dellums casting the first "nay." Almost all the local Democrats voted against it, though not Barbara Boxer. For Congress as a whole, though, it was a relief that

Since the vote, Ron Dellums has been seeking signatures from colleagues for a letter to the President informing him, like the Bennett bill, that "the United States Constitution requires the Congress to make the decision regarding the final escalation of this confrontation."

How does it feel to be reliving 1964 again?

It's hard to take. It's driving me crazy, as a matter of fact.

Actually, there's more questioning and resistance going on now than there was at this point in the Vietnam War—there was virtually none then—and that does reflect some learning from experience, but there's another difference that cuts in the other direction.

At that time, in 1964, the administra-

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tion was successfully concealing its preparations and planning for launching a major war. Now, the administration is really not doing that, at least not any longer; for perhaps the first month, you could say they were dissembling, but that hasn't been true for several weeks now. The odd and disturbing thing is that this change doesn't seem to be making much difference politically. Let me pursue this point.

Then as now, in 1964, there were voices outside the Executive Branch calling for an offensive air war. In fact, what was being advocated by hawks was exactly the kind of "Victory Through Air Power" strategy—an exclusively or primarily US Air Force war—that Henry Kissinger has proposed recently, and that General Dugan was promoting just before he got fired.

Then it was being touted by the Republican candidate for President, Senator Barry Goldwater, who was an Air

was no secret then that Goldwater reflected Air Force views, above all those of General Dugan's predecessor as Chief of Staff, the late General Curtis LeMay, godfather of the Strategic Bombing Command.

But the President, Lyndon Johnson, gave the strong impression during the campaign that he sharply opposed that strategy. And the public got no hint that I can recall throughout that summer that any civilian officials in the administration shared any such notions with Goldwater.

The reality was that Secretary of Defense Robert McNamara had authorized the Joint Chiefs of Staff early in the year to pick targets in North Vietnam and to carry out all planning and preparations for a full bombing campaign of the Gold-

water type.

Whether President Johnson had focused on this planning—he certainly knew his Secretary of Defense had directed it—and whether he had decided in his own mind as early as the summer of 1964 to carry it out, I don't know to this day.

What I do know is that my bosses in the Pentagon were not only "considering this seriously"—which would have amazed the electorate, given what they were hearing from the President—but they fully expected the President to order it carried out soon after the November election, whether he had made his mind up about it earlier or not.

I have no doubt at all that the Pentagon is filled with people, one of them probably sitting at my old desk, who have seen almost identical plans and who have the same expectations as I had, a month before the coming elections.

But here's a difference. If I had taken



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the top secret directives for those plans out of my office safe and given them to members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee—as I should have done, given my awareness that they were being lied to—the Senators would have been astonished, and they might well have changed history.

In fact, I did do just that, five years later, after three million tons of bombs had been dropped; and the Foreign Relations Committee promptly voted to repeal the Tonkin Gulf Resolution—too late to stop the war, which went on several more years and four more million tons of bombs. Almost four World War II's worth of bombs, altogether: the equivalent of a Hiroshima a week, for seven and a half years.

Senator Morse, one of the two Senators who had voted against the resolution in 1964, didn't make me feel very good by telling me in 1971, after I had released the Pentagon Papers to the public, that if I had given them to him on the committee in '64, "The Tonkin Gulf Resolution would never have gotten out of committee, and if it had, it would certainly never have passed."

Anyway, when the steady bombing

campaign did begin in February, it came basically as a surprise, without warning to Congress or the public. Unlike now, Congress had that excuse for having failed to do anything to stop it, or even to investigate or debate it.

On election day, 1964, I represented my boss, and the Office of Secretary of Defense at an interagency meeting held to discuss alternative bombing strategies (all of which I was against, by the way, as was my boss; but *his* boss, McNamara, felt differently, and we did what he wanted).

It was that day that voters, as expected, were registering an unprecedented landslide vote largely *against* Goldwater's bombing proposals, which we incumbents were, in secret, expecting to implement. We didn't meet to compare bombing options the day *before* the election, because that just might have leaked, and reduced Johnson's landslide. And we didn't wait till the day after the voting, because it was felt there was no time to lose.

I don't think they'll wait till election Day for the meeting this year—though they may hold the actual bombing back till a week or so after, unless Saddam provides an irresistible threat.

fore the election—because it seems they don't have to fear the impact of leaks this time. There have been plenty lately to no great effect.

Who will be surprised if the bombing starts soon, whether in October, November, or December? General Dugan has laid out the nature of the Air Force plans, and no one has suggested that he was fired because his account was inaccurate.

Nor would anyone be surprised now to learn that [Secretary of Defense Richard] Cheney had gone over such plans and approved them. The big news in '64, if I had put out the Pentagon Papers then, would have been that what people thought were Air Force fantasies had the backing of high administration civilians. Who believes otherwise today? Most people may have been misled on administration aims and strategy in the first weeks of the crisis—I was, for one—but by now we've been told.

From the first announcement on August 8 till quite recently, the President and other administration officials insisted, on the record, that the military tasks of our forces in Saudi Arabia were defensive and deterrent; we had "drawn a line in the sand" at the southern border of

strategy for pressing Iraq to withdraw from Kuwait was not military but economic, the embargo.

But for over a month now, countless officials have told reporters of undeclared goals—like destroying Iraq's military capability, and its nuclear and chemical facilities, or ousting Iraqis from Kuwait more quickly and surely than the embargo can be expected to do—that can only be achieved by offensive attack, i.e., by war.

Saudi, Egyptian, Syrian, and Israeli officials have made no secret that they are pressing hard for such an attack, "no later than mid-November"; nor of the fact that from their talks with Americans, *they expect it to happen*, just as many US officials acknowledge their own expectations.

All this is known to Congress. Look at this week's *Time* magazine [October 8 issue], out on the stands before Congress voted last Monday. "Nowadays the talk is mainly about when, not if, there will be war. House Armed Services Committee chairman Les Aspin said last week the Bush administration appeared to be 'looking more and more favorably on the war option.'"

Same article: "The growing acceptance of the inevitability of war springs from a consensus that Saddam has made up his mind not to back down.... Of course, if Saddam becomes convinced he cannot win, he could then retreat [i.e., withdraw unconditionally from Kuwait and release hostages] with his war machine fully intact, a scenario that chills his opponents." (Administration sources usually refer to this last possibility—that Saddam might yield to the UN demands, publicly endorsed by Bush, before the US had gone to war against his forces as "the nightmare scenario")

Next page: "Saddam in the Cross Hairs." (A "senior official in the Pentagon" says that General Dugan wouldn't have been criticized on this point if he had "left Saddam's family and mistress,

the target was Iraqi command and control.")

Carl Bernstein, from Baghdad: "The countdown to a finale has begun, and almost everyone here seems to know it..." "Almost all diplomats here seem to be operating on the assumption that an attack by US-led forces could begin within two weeks—as soon as the weather turns cooler in the desert and in the Gulf.... They say that it is the heat, and not just the desire to maximize manpower and equipment levels or the possibility of diplomacy, that has delayed a military response until now."

Then a piece on Israel's attitudes toward war: "highly probable," perhaps within weeks; also highly desirable in the eyes of officials (compared to the night-

those expectations all define terrible, frightening situations, since none of us believe in the utopian schemes of the Air Force—which may have seduced some of our Middle East allies—that project something like a Six-Day War, with almost no allied casualties.

Still, those odds could be worse. Speaking for myself, I see a fairly large chance, though, unfortunately, less than even, that the President will not launch an offensive against the Iraqis in the near future, even if the alternative is a prolonged stalemate or some outcome he would experience as a failure. And I think that chance can be enlarged by various kinds of political action, which makes such action extremely urgent.

But I'm not sure that most other peo-

mates of civilian casualties from comprehensive US air strikes? What is the range of uncertainty? What are the premises and the methodology of the estimate?

Likewise, what are the best estimates, and the range, of US and allied casualties in an air/ground offensive to retake Kuwait, under different assumptions? Under what conditions might the ground war be extended throughout Iraq, and what then would be the estimated US and civilian casualties? What is the "butcher's bill"?

What is the range of possible casualties inflicted by Iraqi retaliatory attacks, including chemical warfare, on cities in Israel, Egypt, Syria, and Saudi Arabia?

Assuming the near-certainty of Israeli intervention alongside the US (whether desired or not), how might a US/Israeli attack on an Arab and Muslim country affect: Our current alliances in the region, and the prospects for collaborative peacekeeping in the region, or elsewhere in the Muslim world? The likelihood of popular uprisings against Arab or Muslim regimes now aligned with the US? The probability of prolonged US involvement in counterinsurgency campaigns across the Middle East (and perhaps as far away as Indonesia)? The likelihood and scale of desperate, suicidal, terrorist attacks in the West?

What is the worst Saddam might be able to do in carrying out his threat to destroy Middle East oil production in retaliation? What is the range of possible effects on the global economy?

I give the government apparatus enough credit to believe that someone has been addressing these questions by now, even without public pressure to do so. And the results, especially the uncertainties, are bound to be sobering.

Time quotes "a Bush adviser" who says that "everyone is confident" that "a war against Iraq will resemble a turkey shoot." I really question whether "everyone" around Bush, civilian and military, can be quite that stupid: even though, to be sure, 25 years have passed since our

last war, and 45 years since we faced an opponent with technology roughly comparable to our own.

Iraq is said to have the fourth largest and the third most technically sophisticated armed forces in the world: not the very most promising target for a preventive, disarming war, even by us. No doubt Iraq will lose most of its high technology gear in a matter of days or a few weeks, but some of those turkeys are going to get off the ground, highly armed, and shoot before they get shot.

Even those first few spectacular days of the war won't be quite as one-sided or "surgical" as General Dugan's briefers may promise. There will be more blood in US cockpits and a lot more blood on the ground, civilians' and children's, not only in Iraq and Kuwait, but in Israel and Egypt and Saudi Arabia.

Nor can the American offensive be confined to the air. Many Iraqi troops will probably surrender under air attack in Kuwait and Iraq, as they lose commanders and communications and confidence. But many will not. The heavy tank divisions and Marine amphibious forces will be sent in to do what they have already been told is their job: to liberate Kuwait and rescue hostages.

The President is almost surely reluctant to launch a ground invasion of Iraq itself. But even if the "smart bombs" addressed personally to Saddam prove smarter and more successful than those sent to Khadafy or Noriega, his successors might well prove both hostile and tenacious.

Bush might find it hard to abide for long their threats to hostages, their defiance, and their appeals to Holy War and terrorism. If he finally decides to send the tanks and ground troops into Iraq to oust them, and the drive to Baghdad—which the Center of Defense Information estimates would take three months—is followed by guerrilla warfare, then the initial replay of the Six-Day War may be followed by an endless rerun of Vietnam.

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mare scenario). Finally, a column by Michael Kramer, which begins: "War by Christmas and perhaps much sooner. That is the latest estimate from Washington and abroad."

Do you think Time has it right?

I'm sure they're right about the attitudes they're reporting, from the Pentagon and the White House and the Middle East allies, because now everyone is reporting pretty much the same thing. Journalists on some papers, like the *London Times*, the *Los Angeles Times*, and *Newsday*, were citing sources to this effect as early as mid-August, but for some reason the *New York Times* and others weren't until several weeks ago.

But do you think war is inevitable, if Saddam won't back down quickly, in the next few weeks or months?

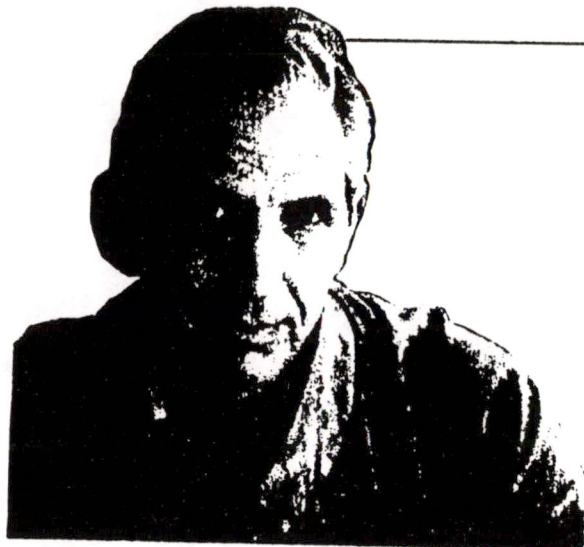
No, I don't. Like some friends of mine, whose judgment I generally trust, I put the odds at about sixty/fifty in favor of war. Their odds happen to range from forty/sixty to seventy/thirty. Of course,

ple react to odds like these the way I do. Can it be that the public's passivity, this widespread appearance of indifference, simply reflects the fact that it's not certain, it's only likely, that the President will decide to launch a war? We're passengers in a car with bad brakes, with a driver who's suddenly decided to play chicken; but it's not *certain* that our driver will fail to swerve if the other guy doesn't, so...no sweat!

Why do you see the chance of averting war as large as you do?

Because the case *against* attacking is so strong, once you begin to ask the relevant questions. The media have done little more than hint at some of those questions so far, without really answering them, and Congress seems not to have done even that. One of the most helpful forms of political action would be to press Congress to seek credible answers to certain questions, and to demand that the Executive provide them.

For example: What are the best esti-



"The problem is not just with Bush. Any man who is willing to go through years of presidential campaigning in order to be Commander in Chief is, in important ways, crazy, and not to be trusted. He needs as much monitoring and restraining as our Constitution originally provided."

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Bush knows that he will be the one to be blamed if the results are at the wrong end of those uncertainties. That will give him pause. More importantly, the more the public comes to know in advance the range of uncertainty that Bush is looking at, especially the more ominous possibilities, the harder it will be for Bush to ignore these risks, to shut his eyes and "roll the iron dice."

In face of risks like these, how can the odds that Bush will attack be as high as fifty or sixty percent?

Because the alternative might look to him like defeat, failure, and certain and immediate humiliation. I'm not sure he could accept that, even if he had to go to war to avoid it, even if he recognized that war had a significant risk of being catastrophic.

Bush, just like Saddam, has put himself in this box by his own choices over the last two months. Instead Bush could have limited both his goals and his means to those that he announced publicly at the outset: ousting the Iraqis from Kuwait over time by means of economic warfare only, the embargo buttressed by a blockade, and deterring Iraqi invasion of Saudi Arabia by a multilateral force including US troops oriented, in scale and type, solely to defensive operations

on the ground, plus [the threat of] offensive air operations.

The defensive force, whether a few tens of thousands or twice that, would have neither signaled an intent to invade Kuwait or Iraq, nor represented such an investment of resources and prestige as to compel adopting ambitious goals to justify its deployment. Nor would it be so expensive to maintain in Saudi Arabia as to tempt him to make a premature decision to give up on the embargo and take the gamble of offensive action.

By contrast, the huge buildup of offensive forces that Bush chose to program into Saudi Arabia constitutes such a dramatic and costly commitment that even a peaceful withdrawal of Iraqi forces from Kuwait—the actual UN and US public demand on Saddam—would seem a letdown, a kind of failure: namely, a failure to destroy Iraq's armed forces. Nor can a compromise solution easily be contemplated after such a commitment, which is another reason why Bush is eschewing negotiations that might lead to an Iraqi withdrawal without total humiliation and without war. Moreover, the month-to-month costs of [maintaining] such a large force in the desert, [with the attendant] morale problems, make it politically very difficult if not impossible to accept a prolonged stalemate. Waiting

for the embargo to succeed in forcing Iraq out of Kuwait could easily take one or two years, including desert summers.

Reportedly it was General Powell who urged the massive deployment, based on an operations plan originally developed for war in the Middle East against either the Soviets or the Iranians, if any ground deployment was to be made at all. Why the President was persuaded to choose this option, with such fateful consequences, I can only speculate.

Perhaps Powell, and/or Bush, intended to carry out offensive operations from the beginning; their public adoption of much more limited ends and means could have been dissimulation, to get maximum international support and to lull vacationing Americans.

I think it more likely that Powell sold the heavy deployment to the President on several grounds: that it was more deterrent; that it was safer for the troops and for the US (if deterrence failed); that it provided the President with more options; and that, by threatening offensive action, it maximized the chance that Saddam Hussein would back out of Kuwait without a shooting war.

The last point is true. It is also true that it would be very wise from every point of view for Hussein to back down peacefully and immediately, faced with

the allied forces that are now confronting him and the likelihood they will be used. He may yet do just that. Or he may not.

In the latter case the commitment of forces this large will shortly make the President aware of something neither he nor General Powell may have fully foreseen at the outset: it has made it difficult or impossible for him *not* to use these forces offensively, and rather soon after they are fully built up, to retake Kuwait militarily and to destroy Iraq's military capability, perhaps to occupy Iraq.

Ironically, by selling this particular "option" to the President, Powell may have actually narrowed the President's options in the event that Saddam does *not* back down: foreclosing Bush's ability to accept a prolonged stalemate or even a limited victory without political embarrassment. And to the extent that this increases the chance of war, it doesn't do well by the goals of "deterrence" or "troop safety," either.

As far back as August 19, the *London Sunday Times* Insight team had concluded that "the decision has been taken" by Bush to attack Iraqi forces as soon as the offensive buildup was complete, then expected to be mid-October. As I've just indicated, I'm not at all sure they were strictly right at the time, that the President thought of himself as having decided so soon. He may well still feel that the question remains to be decided next month; though he may not have left himself as much freedom of action as he supposes.

How do you assess Bush's personal and political psychology now?

I'm no authority on that, but one thing is rather apparent. Bush may be dangerous because he seems often to be perceived by others as a wimp, and because he can't stand that.

Aside from that, he was facing a number of problems just prior to this crisis. The savings and loan scandal in which his son is involved was growing; a recession is likely; and there has been a grow-

ing perception that world leadership was slipping away on his watch. I think he was primed, cocked, to seize an opportunity to act boldly and dramatically.

That may have had some bearing on his early, fateful decision to give the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs his head, in effect, in responding to the initial challenge, and to program the massive deployment.

Several headlines from the August 19 London Sunday Times Insight story I

That has it, I'm afraid, about right. As of now, it is a duel: neither party is encumbered by an active Congress. And Bush's Clint Eastwood imitations scare me at least as much as Reagan's. Reagan cultivated that machismo image, but in Lebanon he proved capable of stepping back when tested. Is Bush? Is Saddam? This pair just may be a very dangerous match.

One of the crucial insights of feminism which rarely finds its way into leftist rhe-

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mentioned above might be very revealing. One says: "There are no plans for a stalemate in the Gulf: the Pentagon is on a war footing, and the President is prepared to strike." And the caption just below a very stern picture of the President: "From wimp to warrior, George Bush's decisive handling of the Gulf crisis has won him the admiration of Pentagon chiefs."

The headline under the tough picture of the President is MAKE MY DAY. Under it, the sub-headline: "Tough guy Bush challenges Saddam to duel in the desert."

toric is that the old ways of being masculine and resolving conflicts can no longer work in a nuclear age. Either we find new ways of being masculine, or we blow ourselves up.

It's not just nuclear weapons that have made militarism, warfare, and machismo among statesmen obsolete; it's the 20th century, or the industrial era. We may be about to see, once again, how much mass destruction is possible without nuclear weapons: with napalm and white phosphorus, CBUs and chemical warheads.

What I'm concerned about could be called ordinary male madness, especial-

ly among men of power. It has elements of recklessness, of super-sensitivity to humiliation, and—to the end of avoiding humiliation or defeat—a willingness to kill vast numbers of people, mainly non-combatants. Unrestrained obedience is another feature of this, a willingness to do *anything*, no matter how reckless or murderous, in response to a command or as part of a team effort.

My own experience and study of government operations for a third of a century has led me to the disheartening conclusion that men in power may well take a high risk of killing any number of people and causing societal catastrophe rather than suffer an otherwise certain, short-run humiliation or political failure. Their own prospective loss, which they perceive as the nation's loss, of face and power and prestige, is more important to them, more real and frightening, than the risk or sacrifice of other people's lives.

That's a long way of talking about what Paine called "the pride of kings" that leads to wars. It's why it is so important that we stop talking and acting in this country as if it were Bush's decision, by right, whether we go to war. We are actually watching passively at this moment to see what happens next, to see what he will do, and we're letting Congress do the same. We must break out of that behavior.

The current constitutional system has

failed badly on the issue of war and peace, and the War Powers Act isn't an adequate fix even if it were implemented. The drafters of the Constitution got it right the first time.

The problem is not just with Bush. Any man who is willing to go through years of presidential campaigning in order to be Commander in Chief is, in important ways, crazy, and not to be trusted. He needs as much monitoring and restraining as our Constitution originally provided, including the possibility of impeachment, at least as much for his possible abuses of power in foreign policy as for domestic crimes. In any case, the decision for war must never be turned over to a single man—as is done in Iraq!

Early on in the first days of this crisis, a number of people called Hussein a madman. That led to a whole rash of expert articles by people who had been studying Hussein for some time and felt it important to point out that "Hussein is not a madman." They all went on to say something to this effect: "He is absolutely ruthless; he's tyrannical; he's brutal; but he's calculating—realistic, though he obviously makes mistakes—and he's not a madman."

Then in the next paragraph they would comment that it should be understood that he would not *back down*, no matter

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what. He would rather bring on World War III. And if he were pressed to the wall and faced with utter defeat, "he'll let loose with everything he has."

I remember reading these articles and thinking to myself: "This is not a madman?!" Of course, I knew that the reason these experts didn't recognize him as a madman was that they were describing someone quite like most of the world's powerful leaders, including some we've elected.

A lot of Americans may be willing to go to war because they perceive him to be such a monster.

Well, as Noam Chomsky commented to me recently, Saddam is a monster. He's not the only one running a state, even among our current allies, but as Noam said, the possibility of his gaining control of the oil reserves of Saudi Arabia and building up his military and nuclear capability with those revenues was truly a dangerous prospect, one which was effectively blocked by the earliest actions in this crisis, back in August. It was a prospect that justified those initial moves, the embargo and blockade and the multilateral deterrent effort to contain him. As I said at the beginning, I support that initial effort, in contrast to the offensive buildup and preparations since.

What do you think should be happening right now?

I think the embargo and blockade, a

blockade that doesn't exclude essential food and medicine, should be maintained as long as necessary to force Iraqi withdrawal from Kuwait.

To reduce the financial and political burden to a minimum so that the embargo has time to work, and to eliminate the hair-trigger posture that now may tempt either side to preempt, I would reverse the buildup of US forces in Saudi Arabia. I would remove immediately units not needed for defensive operations, then replace the US component as fully and rapidly as possible with regional Arab forces.

And I would put the multilateral defense forces and the blockade forces under UN Command, under the authority of the Military Staff Committee, as the Soviets have urged.

What about Saddam's offensive capability, including the daunting prospect of his getting nuclear weapons? Isn't that a major reason why a lot of Americans are attracted to the thought of a preventive war?

I would rule out a preventive war as the answer for much the same reasons that I think Eisenhower was right to forego preventive war against Stalin, who was also a monster, when he was on his way to getting a stockpile of atomic and then hydrogen weapons.

To deal with the long-run problems posed by the ambitions and capabilities possessed by Iraq's leader, and not only by Iraq's—not one of these threats begins or ends with Saddam Hussein—I would

bring to the top of the international agenda the whole package of negotiations and measures urged by [French President François] Mitterand and by [Soviet Foreign Minister Eduard] Shevardnadze at the UN last week (September 24 and 25): an international conference to resolve the Palestinian and Lebanese conflicts, followed by a process of mutually agreed regional arms reductions; the tightening and expansion of the nuclear nonproliferation treaty to which Iraq is a party, and which Israel must be pressed to join

the most successful preventive attack would not buy long-term security in the region. Unless permanently occupied, a vengeful Iraq would use its oil wealth to rebuild its offensive capability as soon as possible. The Air Force would be challenged to repeat its surgery every decade, like mowing the lawn. And other states would present the same challenge.

In fact, without the kind of strengthening of the nonproliferation treaty as a whole that we need to keep an Iraq from developing nuclear weapons, there will

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—including the stopping of nuclear tests; the elimination of chemical weapons; the control, and eventually the elimination of conventional arms sales, the international arms trade; and the organization of a permanent "rapid response" UN peace-keeping force.

If we can avert a war, the chances for real success in each one of these negotiations look better than they ever have before, with the spirit of international unity aroused by this very crisis. And they look a lot better, overall, than the chances of avoiding catastrophe in a preventive war.

If progress is not sought and achieved along all these various lines, then even

soon be a black market that would permit Iraq to buy nuclear weapons.

Our only hope for averting proliferation and achieving common security both in the region and the world is the kind of intense collaborative effort this very crisis has evoked so far: which would be destroyed, probably for good, by a US/Israeli attack on Iraq.

As Shevardnadze said, speaking specifically of nuclear nonproliferation, "It is time to trigger off the emergency systems in order to save the situation." The emergency system our Constitution gives us to save us from a US-initiated war is Congress. It is, at the moment, asleep at the switch.